Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the New West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

What has become of the New Western History that erupted on the American historiographical scene in the 1980s? Distinctive in its emphasis on the four "c"s – continuity, convergence, conquest and complexity – this new interpretation of the history of the American West challenged beloved myths and orthodox notions that had dominated American historiography since Fredrick Jackson Turner published his "Frontier Thesis" in 1893. The simplistic tale of the frontier adventures of white men prior to 1890 when Turner declared the frontier officially closed was disrupted by a new portrait of the West that extended into the twentieth century and included Natives, Mexican Americans and women. In this New Western History the word conquest made explicit the seizure of land and resources by white Americans often using violent means. The result was a "messier" but more vibrant history that was also more relevant to the experience of late twentieth century Americans.

Patricia Limerick's *Something in the Soil* is a loose collection of essays that further elaborate the precepts of the New Western History, which she first described in *The Legacy of Conquest* twenty years earlier. The essays are united by Limerick's attempt "to provide a more-grounded and down-to-earth version of the history of the American West" (28) Equally central to Limerick's purpose, is an attempt to revitalize the historical profession itself, which has been under siege in recent decades. To both of these tasks Limerick brings a populist style of writing and clarity of language that seems guaranteed to achieve her stated goals of reaching a larger audience than specialists and academics and rehabilitating the public image of historians. While at times her tactics for conveying an argument verge on the goofy – such as a suggesting environmental prizes for "people who didn't go anywhere" (178) and an academic prize for "The Most Dramatic Escape from Academic Specialization and Jargon" (331) – for the most part this approach holds interest and promotes understanding without becoming silly.

The book's loose structure reflects the genesis of each chapter as a self-contained essay or talk conceived for a unique purpose. Apart from the introduction, only one of the sixteen chapters was written for this book and the majority have been previously published. One of the book's strengths is its ability to demonstrate the continuing power and relevance of the New Western History as a means to uncover alternative ways of seeing the American West. "The Case of the Premature Departure," for example, demonstrates the persistently East coast standpoint or perspective from which most American history survey texts continue to view the American West. Drawing on the first "c" in the tenets of the New Western History, Limerick argues convincingly that important continuities exist between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that

are obscured by this historical model, which emphasizes a westward moving line of frontier development that ended in 1890. Similarly, a section on "Beleaguered Great White Men" re-examines three major figures in Western American history or historiography through the lens of the New Western History, which, she argues, reveals a complexity that makes them infinitely more interesting and yields valuable "lessons" in history (109).

Limerick's most insightful and evocative essay, "Disorientation and Reorientation: The American Landscape Discovered from the West," explores the reaction of Asian Americans to coercive relocation to the Western interior after the bombing of Pearl Harbour. Using the words of Japanese Americans in poetry and prose, Limerick powerfully conveys feelings of humiliation, fear, despair, and also hope as Japanese-Americans confronted the arid interior and eventually planted successful gardens. As she notes, the gardens' success raises interesting new questions about the environment. In this way Limerick's purposeful reversal of the conventional model for discovery of the Western landscape raises complex environmental questions and clearly illustrates the themes of conquest and complexity that are key elements of the New Western History.

The final section of the book is a "how-to guide" for historians to become more engaged and more engaging writers and speakers. This is a theme interwoven throughout the essays, reflecting Limerick's vision of history as one of the "applied" humanities: history can help us "to step away, at least momentarily, from the bitterness of current controversies and to place those controversies in a more reflective context ..." (15). Limerick argues that historians can best perform this role if they are highly involved with the public, actively exchanging information and attending to the views of non-academics.

The sheer variety of audiences targeted by these essays seems to demonstrate the success of Limerick's approach. Popular success may also explain the book's lack of political edge with respect to class and gender issues. The book would have been strengthened by more explicit reflection on the ways in which class and gender influenced Limerick's perspective, as she did to good effect in discussing her religious upbringing and ethnic roots. Its effect can be seen in her perceptive analysis in the areas of ethnicity and the environment, which may be less politically perilous topics. For example, while her arguments address the stark economic disparity faced by different people in the West, and touch on the gendered nature of Western historiography, she fails to probe deeply in these areas. There is no systematic critique of the American economic system. She seems to poke fun at her belief, implicit in *The Legacy of Conquest*, that "if people from backgrounds of privilege took seriously the history of people from backgrounds of scarcity, then the privileged people would redistribute their wealth, pay equitable wages, and forswear economic advantage" (264). Yet Limerick does not indicate where her analysis of class has moved since then.

Similarly, the New Western History would be enriched by a more in-depth analysis of gender. Limerick touches on the importance of the West as a "mythic region where men are men, and women recognize and celebrate the maleness of men" in her essay exploring why the interior West became enormously popular in the late twentieth century (280-1) There is much scope for a more sustained treatment of gender throughout her work that would enrich our understanding of both the West and the larger American culture. The absence of such analysis in these essays, given the extensive literature on gender history in the West, makes this omission seem glaring.

Despite these limitations, *Something in the Soil* further demonstrates the analytic power of the New Western History and provides many fascinating glimpses of the American West – past and present. Limerick's latest offering is also valuable in that it highlights the popular appeal of the New Western History. Finally, Limerick's focus on useful tools of the trade and provocative ideas offers fresh inspiration to all historians.

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Mary H. Blewett, *Constant Turmoil: The Politics of Industrial Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).

Mary H. Blewett has written a comprehensive work about the coming of and the growth of the industrial order in southeastern New England in the nineteenth century. Much attention is given to the textile world there epitomized by the sister cities of Fall River and New Bedford. While the author discusses the early role of the Borden family in Fall River's industrialization first, she also covers the role of other families, including the Chaces, Durfees, and Stickneys in Fall River's rise as a textile center after 1865.

The manufacturers concentrated on increasing production at the expense of their workers' lives. Overproduction led to wage cuts based on the "laws" of supply and demand. When the workers countered with calls for a ten-hour day, the manufacturers' thrust for cheap production came to the fore. Eventually the workers' fight for the ten-hour movement and against wage cuts led them to engage in strikes in Fall River in 1848 and 1850. As Blewett states "British immigrants and New England workers joined together to oppose unjust treatment in 1848 and in 1850 they did it again" (84). While conceding that "The defeat of the strikes in 1848 and 1850 meant that the textile workers in the Fall